



Love Is Lust First: An Autobiography of Passion

David Amadeus Panckeri

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Passionate poetry enhances the sincerity of this memoir about thwarted love.

David Amadeus Panckeri's memoir, *Love Is Lust First*, is labeled by the author as "an autobiography of passion" and contains a combination of autobiographical prose and poetry. In a spirited introduction, Panckeri writes:

I publish this book solely to WARN others against wasting 30 years or even 30 minutes following their heads and minds and brains and thereby forfeiting (perhaps forever, as I may have done with Alessandra) the joy and passion that comes with encountering a partner your heart and soul will love forever.

A large portion of the book deals with the strained, sad relationship between Panckeri and Alessandra, a woman twenty-seven years his junior. This relationship developed as Panckeri's wife of thirty-one years was in a coma, dying. Perhaps the strangest and most intriguing aspect of the relationship is the detail and passion that is ascribed to Alessandra in both the autobiographical sketches and the poems, particularly since the two have never met face to face.

This, almost shockingly, becomes the book's obsessive trope: Panckeri's search for a woman whom he fell in love with over the phone very shortly before his wife died. "It turns out," Panckeri writes, "that out of the hundred thousand game players that evening on Yahoo and out of the six billion people on earth, I met Alessandra and she changed my life forever." After chatting with her online, Panckeri speaks to her on the phone, a moment he describes as being "transported somewhere else to some other time in my forgotten past life."

The book's message, albeit unevenly detailed (we never get much information about why Panckeri disappears after setting up a date with Alessandra or what exactly his "stupid mistakes" were) is sincere in its profound declarations. At a certain point, however, it becomes hard not to be slightly disturbed about how passionate Panckeri is about a woman he's never met, and about the pictures he includes of her in the book, especially when taking into account how spare he is about the mistakes that led up to him never meeting her. In one of Panckeri's interludes, he writes, "Ally and I talked fitfully in January and into early February 2005, seemingly incapable of resuming our former level of constant contact and mental intimacy. ... I left messages via email and IM and called her beseeching her to call me back. I filled up her voice mail box again and she left it full, a very bad sign." These kinds of episodes happen throughout, and Panckeri, by the epilogue, hopes that "this book can somehow serve to facilitate our finally meeting."

In his poetry, most of which is addressed to Alessandra, a conversational tone and short lines accentuate his passion and sincerity, as in "Serendipity": "I came to you / as a recluse from joy, / my heart weary / from thirty years / of broken dreams." These poems are voiced well, but paired with the autobiographical material before them, they become a part of the narrative in a way that, while certainly enhancing it, also lessens their ability to surprise and speak for themselves. The poems that fill the second half of the book deal with a variety of subjects, including music, Panckeri's life as a father, his relationship with his late wife, and literature, but the undercurrent of his relationship with

Alessandra trumps these subjects, if only because of the lengths to which the author goes to describe and justify it as real and sincere.

KENNY JAKUBAS (June 2, 2015)

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